

# A THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS OF PROVERBS 31 AS MASCULINE INSTRUCTION IN COVENANT DISCERNMENT

箴言第三十一章乃教導男子以聖約品格擇偶之訓誨

- Frank Leo 劉宗唐 משה הלוי Φραγκίσκος Μωυσῆς Λευιτάκης  
משה לוין (לעווין)

---

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE MISAPPROPRIATION OF PROVERBS 31

English:

Proverbs 31 is perhaps the most frequently misapplied chapter in the entire corpus of Wisdom Literature. In contemporary Christian culture, it is routinely deployed as a prescriptive text addressed to women, functioning as a behavioural checklist against which wives and mothers measure their spiritual worth. Bridal showers, women's conferences, devotional books, and church curricula have collectively transformed this passage into a "how-to manual for becoming the perfect woman" — a purpose it was never designed to serve. As the scholars at CBE International have observed, "The description of the Prov 31 wife is not intended as specific, detailed instructions for how to get married or become the perfect wife and mother."<sup>1</sup> The text's actual rhetorical situation, audience, genre, and theological purpose have been catastrophically obscured by this popular misreading.

## Middel Englissh:

þe Proverbes of þe Oon-and-Þrittþ Chapitre ben perchaunce þe moste *mis-aplied* passage in al þe grete Boke of Wisdam-Lore. In þis present tyme of Cristen folk-custome, it is oft-tymes *wield-ed* as a text of bidding direct-ed to wommen, werk-yng as a *liste-of-behavioures* ageyns þe whiche wyves and modres meten hire goostly worþ. Bryd-festes, wommen-gaderynges, devocioun-bokes, and chirche-learnynge han togidre turned þis passage into a *how-to-do boke for bicomynge þe parfit womman* — a purpos for whiche it was nevere *craft-ed*. Þe textes soþfast *spekyng-situacioun*, herers, kynde, and goostly purpos han been *catastrofik-ly* hid by þis folk-mis-redynge.

中文：

箴言第三十一章或許是整卷智慧文學中被誤用最為嚴重的一章。在當代基督教文化中，此章經常被當作一段對「女性」說話的規範性經文，被用來作為妻子與母親衡量其靈性價值的行為清單。婚前派對、婦女退修會、靈修書籍，以及教會課程，已共同將此段經文轉化為「如何成為完美女人的指南手冊」——然而，這從來不是此篇經文被設計的目的。正如基督徒平等聖經學者 (CBE International) 所指出：「箴言三十一章的婦人描述，並非意在作為如何結婚或成為完美妻子與母親的具體、詳盡指導。」<sup>1</sup> 此經文真正的修辭情境、對象聽眾、文體類型與神學目的，已被這種流行的誤讀徹底掩蓋。

---

## II. THE SUPERScription: A KING'S ORACLE, A MAN'S INSTRUCTION

English:

The chapter opens with an unambiguous superscription: "*The words of King Lemuel — an oracle [מַשָּׁה, massā'] that his mother taught him*" (Proverbs 31:1, ESV). Three critical observations must be drawn from this opening verse. First, the speaker is identified as a *king* — a male ruler. Second, the term *massā'* (מַשָּׁה) denotes a prophetic burden or oracle, the same word used of prophetic utterances elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Isaiah 13:1; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1). As Bruce Waltke notes, "she speaks with a voice and authority of a prophet as well as being a very wise woman."<sup>2</sup> Third, and most critically, the *recipient* of this oracle is a man — a son, a king. The mother addresses him directly: "*What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?*" (31:2).

The threefold repetition of "*What are you doing?*" (מַה-בְּרִי, *mah-b'ri*) functions as a corrective challenge — a mother calling her royal son to pause and consider his actions before he squanders his kingship through folly.<sup>3</sup> The entire chapter, from verse 1 through verse 31, thus constitutes instruction *from* a woman *to* a man, about how a man should govern his life, his appetites, and his choice of wife.

### **Middel Englishsh:**

Þe chapitre open-ep wiþ an *un-mistakable* over-wrytyng: "*Þe wordes of Kyng Lemuel — an oracul [מַשָּׁה, massā'] þat his moder taughte hym*" (Proverbes 31:1). Þre kritik poyntes mosten be drawn fro þis openyng vers. First, þe speker is namd a *kyng* — a man-ruler. Secound, þe terme *massā'* (מַשָּׁה) betoknep a *profetik burdoun* or oracul, þe same worde used of profetiik *utteraunces* elles-where in Holy Wrytyng. As Bruce Waltke notep, "she spekep wiþ a voys and auctoritee of a prophete." Þridde, and moste kritik-ly, þe *receivere* of þis oracul is a man — a sone, a kyng. Þe moder spekep to hym direct: "*What dost þou, my sone? What dost þou, sone of my wombe? What dost þou, sone of my vowes?*" (31:2).

Be pre-fold repetyng of "*What dost pou?*" werk-ep as a *correctif challenge* — a moder callynge hire roial sone to *pausen* and *considren* his dedes er he wastyng-ly-spendep his kyngshipe þorugh folye. Be hool chapitre, from vers oon þorugh vers oon-and-þrittip, þus make-ep up instruccioune *from* a womman *to* a man, about how a man sholde governe his lyf, his appetites, and his choysynge of wyf.

中文：

本章以一段明確無疑的題記開頭：「利慕伊勒王的言語，是他母親教導他的『默示』[*אִשָּׁה*, *massā'*](箴言31:1, 和合本參照)。從此開卷之節中，必須提取三項關鍵觀察。第一，說話者被指認為一位「君王」——一位男性統治者。第二，「*massā'*」(*אִשָּׁה*)一詞意指先知性的重擔或默示，此詞在聖經他處亦用於先知性的宣告(參以賽亞書13:1; 那鴻書1:1; 哈巴谷書1:1)。如布魯斯·沃爾基(Bruce Waltke)所言：「她以先知的聲音和權柄說話，同時也是一位極有智慧的婦人。」<sup>2</sup> 第三，也是最關鍵的一點：此默示的「領受者」是一位男子——一位兒子、一位君王。母親直接對他說：「我的兒啊，你在做什麼？我腹中的兒啊，你在做什麼？我許願得來的兒啊，你在做什麼？」(31:2)。

「你在做什麼？」(*מַה-בְּרִי*, *mah-b'ri*)的三重複述，起著糾正性質問的功能——一位母親呼喚她的王子停下來省察自己的行為，免得他因愚昧而虛擲王權。<sup>3</sup> 因此，整章經文，從第一節直到第三十一節，構成了一段「由」一位女性「給」一位男性的教導——關乎男人當如何治理自己的生命、慾望，以及擇偶之道。

---

### III. THE NEGATIVE INSTRUCTION: WHAT A MAN MUST AVOID (VV. 3–9)

English:

Before presenting the positive vision of the *'ēshet chayil* (אִשָּׁה חַיִּיל, "woman of valour"), King Lemuel's mother first establishes what her son must *reject*. The prohibitions of verses 3–9 constitute a *via negativa* that frames the entire teaching:

*"Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings" (31:3).*

*"It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted" (31:4–5).*

The mother warns against two specific forms of self-destruction: **sexual dissipation** (giving one's "strength" [חַיִּל, *chēylkā*] — the same root as *chayil* — to women who "destroy kings") and **drunkenness** that clouds judgment and perverts justice.<sup>4</sup> As Dan Hult observes, "Lemuel's mother is cautioning her son against spending energy pursuing women that he should be using to wisely govern the nation, warning that they would destroy him."<sup>5</sup>

These prohibitions are not incidental; they establish the theological framework for the *'ēshet chayil* poem that follows. The man is told: do not choose a wife from *lust* (the seductress who destroys kings), and do not numb your discernment through *intoxication* (whether literal or metaphorical, as in the intoxication of greed and acquisition). Only with sober, covenant-shaped vision can a man recognise the *'ēshet chayil*.

### **Middel Englissh:**

Er þat she presentþ þe good visioun of þe *'ēshet chayil* (אִשָּׁת חַיִּל, "womman of valour"), Kyng Lemuels moder first stablisþ what hire sone moste *rejecten*. Þe forbiddynges of verses þre þorugh nyne make up a *wey-of-nay-seiyng* þat framþ al þe techynge:

*"Yeve nat þin strengþe to wommen, þine weyes to hem þat destroyen kynges" (31:3).*

Þe moder warnþ ageyns two spēcifik formes of self-undoynge: **flesshly wast-ynge** (yevynge ones *chēylkā* — þe same roote as *chayil* — to wommen þat "destroyen kynges") and **dronkenesse** þat over-cloudeþ doome and *pervert-þ* right-wisnes. Þise forbiddynges ben nat bi-the-wey; þey stablissen þe *godly frame-werk* for þe *'ēshet*

*chayil* poeme bat foloweb. Be man is told: chese nat a wyf fro *lust* (be *bigileres* bat destroyed kynges), and *numbe* nat pin discernynge porugh *drunkenhede*. Oonly wip sobre, *covenant-shapen* sight may a man *recognisen* be 'ēshet *chayil*.

中文：

在展示「才德婦人」(לִיֵּן תַּחְלָה, 'ēshet *chayil*, 「勇德之婦」)的正面願景之前，利慕伊勒的母親首先確立了她兒子必須「拒絕」的事物。第三至九節的禁令構成了一條「否定之路」(via negativa)，框定了整段教訓：

「不要將你的精力給婦女，不要將你的道路給那毀滅君王的」(31:3)。

「利慕伊勒啊，君王喝酒是不相宜的，是不相宜的；王子說濃酒在哪裡也不相宜——恐怕喝了就忘記律例，顛倒一切困苦人的是非」(31:4-5)。

母親警告兩種特定的自我毀滅形式：情慾的揮霍（將自己的「精力」[חֵיל, *chēylkā*]——與 *chayil* 同一字根——給予那些「毀滅君王的」女人）和醉酒（使判斷力昏蔽，顛倒困苦人的公義）。<sup>4</sup> 如丹·赫特 (Dan Hult) 所觀察：「利慕伊勒的母親警告她的兒子不要將本應用於治國的精力耗費在追逐女色上，警告說這會毀滅他。」<sup>5</sup>

這些禁令並非附帶性的；它們為隨後的「才德婦人」之詩建立了神學框架。對這位男子的教導是：不要從「情慾」中選妻（那毀滅君王的妖婦），也不要以「醉酒」麻痺你的辨別力（無論是字面的醉酒，抑或是比喻性的——如貪婪與物質追求的迷醉）。唯有以清醒的、被「聖約塑造的」眼光，男人才能辨認出真正的「才德婦人」。

---

## IV. THE 'ĒSHET CHAYIL: NOT A CHECKLIST FOR WOMEN, BUT A PORTRAIT FOR MEN'S DISCERNMENT (VV. 10–31)

English:

The poem of verses 10–31 is introduced with a rhetorical question directed at the male hearer: "An 'ēshet chayil, who can find?" (31:10, אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל מִי יִמָּצֵא). The question "who can find?" presupposes a male seeker. As Tremper Longman III states, "The original intended audience was not young women ('this is what kind of wife you should be') but young men ('this is what kind of wife you should look for')."⁶ Bruce Waltke concurs: "This is a rare jewel and instructive of a young man and the kind of wife he should be looking for."<sup>7</sup>

The entire book of Proverbs has been addressed, from its opening chapter, to "my son" (בְּנִי, *b'ḥnī*). Solomon's audience is young royal males preparing for life and governance.<sup>8</sup> The personification of Wisdom as a woman (*Chokmah*, חִכְמָה) in chapters 1–9 functions as a literary device making wisdom desirable *to men* through the metaphor of a beautiful woman to pursue and embrace. Proverbs 31:10–31 is the climactic conclusion of this male-directed pedagogy: it presents the *embodied form* of wisdom in the figure of a real, marriageable woman whom the wise man should seek.

The word *chayil* (חַיִּיל) itself demands attention. It occurs over 200 times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>9</sup> In its primary usage, it denotes *military strength, valour, and capability* — it describes soldiers, warriors, armies, and heroes (Judges 6:12; 11:1; 1 Samuel 16:18; 2 Samuel 11:16).<sup>10</sup> When applied to wealth, it indicates "substance" and "resources" (Deuteronomy 8:17; Ezekiel 28:5). The 'ēshet chayil is therefore not a "virtuous woman" in any merely domestic or demure sense — she is a *woman of valour, strength, and covenantal substance*. As Al Wolters demonstrated in his seminal study, the poem is a *heroic hymn* — a genre "characterised by recounting the hero's mighty deeds, usually his military exploits."<sup>11</sup>

**Middel Englissh:**

Pe poeme of verses ten þorugh oon-and-þrittīþ is broght in wip a *rethorik questioun* direct-ed at þe man-herere: "*An 'ēshet chayil, who may fynde?*" (31:10a). Pe questioun "*who may fynde?*" presuppos-ep a man-sekere. As Tremper Longman þe Þridde seip: "Pe original entended herers weren nat yonge wommen ('þis is what kynde of wyf ye sholde be') but yonge men ('þis is what kynde of wyf ye sholde *seken*')."<sup>6</sup> Bruce Waltke agre-ep: "Þis is a *seld-seen jewel* and *techyng-e-ful* for a yonge man and þe kynde of wyf he sholde be lokynge for."<sup>7</sup>

Pe hool Boke of Proverbes hap been addrest, from its openyng chapitre, to "*my sone*" (בְּנִי, *b'nī*). Solomons herers ben yonge roial *man-childer* makynge redy for lyf and governance. Pe word *chayil* (חַיִּיל) it-self demaund-ep *heede*. It bifall-ep over two hundred tymes in þe Ebrew Bible. In its chief usage, it betoknep *militarie strengþe, valour, and capabete* — it descryvþ soudiers, werriours, hostes, and heroes. Pe '*ēshet chayil* is þefore nat a "vertuous womman" in any merely *hous-hold* or *meke* sense — she is a *womman of valour, strengþe, and covenant-substaunce*.

中文：

第十至三十一節的詩篇，以一個修辭性問句引入，且此問句是對男性聽者發出的：「才德的婦人（אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל），誰能得著呢？」（31:10a）。「誰能得著？」（הִי יִקְרָא）此問句預設了一位男性的尋求者。正如朗文三世（Tremper Longman III）所言：「原初的目標聽眾不是年輕女性（『這是你應當成為的那種妻子』），而是年輕男性（『這是你應當尋找的那種妻子』）。」<sup>6</sup> 沃爾基（Bruce Waltke）亦同意：「這是一顆稀世的珍寶，是為教導年輕人他應當尋找什麼樣的妻子。」<sup>7</sup>

整卷箴言書，從其開篇章節起，便是對「我兒」（בְּנִי, *b'nī*）說話。所羅門的聽眾是預備進入人生與治國之途的年輕王族男子。<sup>8</sup> *chayil*（חַיִּיל）一詞本身需要特別注意。它在希伯來聖經中出現超過兩百次。<sup>9</sup> 在其主要用法中，它指「軍事力量、勇武、才幹」——描述的是戰士、勇士、軍隊與英雄（士師記6:12; 11:1; 撒母耳記上16:18; 撒母耳記下11:16）。<sup>10</sup> 應用於財富時，它



指「實質」與「資源」。因此，'ēshet chayil 絕非任何僅僅家居性或溫順意義上的「賢德婦人」——她是一位「勇德之婦、剛強之婦、具聖約實質之婦」。正如沃特斯 (Al Wolters) 在其經典研究中所證明：此詩乃一首「英雄頌歌」(heroic hymn)——其文體特徵為「敘述英雄的偉大事蹟，通常是其軍事功勳。」<sup>11</sup>

---

## V. THE THEOLOGICAL CRUX: "A WOMAN WHO FEARS THE LORD" — COVENANT FAITHFULNESS AS THE CRITERION (V. 30)

English:

The theological climax of the poem is found in verse 30: "*Charm is deceitful, and beauty is fleeting; as for a woman who fears the LORD [יִרְאַת יְהוָה, yir'at YHWH], she should be praised*" (31:30).

This verse operates as a *hermeneutical* key to the entire chapter. It explicitly establishes two *negative* criteria and one *positive* criterion for evaluating a potential wife:

- **Not by charm (חֵן, *chēn*)** — for charm is *deceptive* (שֶׁקֶר, *sheqer*). Charm promises what it cannot deliver; it is a false currency.
- **Not by beauty (יָפִי, *yōfī*)** — for beauty is *vapour* (הֶבֶל, *hevel*, the same word used in Ecclesiastes for "vanity"). Physical attractiveness is transient, insubstantial, and theologically inadequate as a ground for covenantal partnership.
- **By the fear of the LORD (יִרְאַת יְהוָה, *yir'at YHWH*)** — this alone merits praise (תִּתְהַלָּל, *tithallāl*).

The phrase *yir'at YHWH* is the signature theological concept of Proverbs. It forms an *inclusio* around the entire book: "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*"

(1:7) and "*a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised*" (31:30). This is not merely "piety" in a generic sense; in Israelite theology, the "fear of the LORD" is a covenantal concept — it denotes *reverent loyalty to YHWH within the framework of His covenant* (Deuteronomy 6:2, 13, 24; 10:12–13, 20).<sup>12</sup>

Michael V. Fox, in his Anchor Yale Bible commentary on Proverbs, demonstrates that the "fear of the LORD" throughout Proverbs signifies an existential posture of *covenant faithfulness* — the ordering of one's entire life under the sovereignty and Torah of YHWH.<sup>13</sup> The *'ēshet chayil* is therefore fundamentally a *covenant-keeping woman*: one whose life is structured by reverence for God, obedience to His instruction, and fidelity to the covenantal community.

The teaching to the young man is thus profoundly theological: **choose a wife not by greed (wealth) nor by lust (physical beauty), but by the quality of covenant faithfulness — the fear of the LORD.** This is the singular quality that outlasts charm and beauty, that produces genuine *chayil* (substance, strength, valor), and that makes a woman truly praiseworthy.

### Middel Englissh:

þe *godly crux* of þe poeme is founden in vers þrittīþ: "*Charme is deceytful, and beautee is a vapour; but a womman þat dred-ep þe LORD [יִרְאַת יְהוָה, yir'at YHWH], she shal be preysed*" (31:30).

Þis vers werk-ep as a *keye-of-redynge* to þe hool chapitre. It establisheþ *open-ly* two negatif criteri-a and oon positif criterium for þe *weyyng*e of a wyf-to-be:

- **Nat by charme** (חַן, *chēn*) — for charme is *falshed* (שֶׁקֶר, *sheqer*).
- **Nat by beautee** (יָפִי, *yōfī*) — for beautee is *vapour* (הֶבֶל, *hevel*), þe same worde of Ecclesiastes for "vanitee."

- **By þe drede of þe LORD (יִרְאַת יְהוָה, *yir'at YHWH*)** — þis aloon deserveþ preisyng.

Þe phrase *yir'at YHWH* is þe *signe-ful godly concept* of Proverbs. It fourmep an *inclusio* aboute þe hool boke: "*Þe drede of þe LORD is þe biginnyng of knowlechyng*" (1:7) and "*a womman þat dred-ep þe LORD shal be preysed*" (31:30). In Israelit *god-lore*, þe "drede of þe LORD" is a *covenant-concept* — it betoknep *reverent fealtee to YHWH with-inne þe frame-werk of His Covenant*.

Þe techyng to þe yonge man is þus *depe-ly godly*: **chese a wyf nat by gredynesse (welþe) nor by lust (flesshly beautee), but by þe qualitee of covenant-feipfulnesse — þe drede of þe LORD.**

中文：

此詩的神學高潮見於第三十節：「艷麗是虛假的，美容是虛浮的；惟敬畏耶和華的婦女必得稱讚」（31:30）。

此節作為整章的「解經鑰匙」（hermeneutical key）運作。它明確地建立了評估潛在妻子的兩項「否定」標準與一項「肯定」標準：

- 不可憑艷麗 (יָפִי, *chēn*) —— 因為艷麗是「虛假的」（שֶׁקֶר, *sheqer*）。魅力所許諾的，它無法兌現；它是虛假的貨幣。
- 不可憑美容 (יָפִי, *yōfī*) —— 因為美容是「虛浮」（הֶבֶל, *hevel*，與傳道書「虛空」為同一詞）。外貌之美是短暫的、無實質的，在神學上不足以作為立約伴侶的根基。
- 當憑敬畏耶和華 (יִרְאַת יְהוָה, *yir'at YHWH*) —— 唯此配得稱讚 (תִּתְהַלַּל, *tithallāl*)。

「敬畏耶和華」（*yir'at YHWH*）是箴言書的標誌性神學概念。它形成了環繞全書的「首尾呼應」（*inclusio*）：「敬畏耶和華是知識的開端」（1:7）與\*「惟敬畏耶和華的婦女必得稱讚」\*（31:30）。這在以色列神學中並非泛泛的「虔敬」；「敬畏耶和華」是一個「聖約概念」——指在

耶和華聖約的框架內，對祂的主權與妥拉(Torah)存敬畏忠誠(申命記6:2, 13, 24; 10:12-13, 20)。<sup>12</sup>

福克斯(Michael V. Fox)在其「耶魯聖經評註」(Anchor Yale Bible)的箴言註釋中證明，箴言書中的「敬畏耶和華」表達一種「聖約忠信」的存在姿態——即在耶和華的主權和妥拉之下安排自己的整個生命。<sup>13</sup> 因此，「才德婦人」(*'ēshet chayil*)根本上是一位「守約的婦人」：其生命以敬畏神、順服祂的教訓、忠於聖約群體為結構。

對年輕男子的教導因此具有深刻的神學性：擇偶不可憑貪婪(財富)，也不可憑情慾(外貌之美)，而當憑聖約忠信的品質——敬畏耶和華。唯有此品質能超越艷麗與美容之短暫，產生真正的 *chayil*(實質、剛強、勇德)，使婦人真正配得稱讚。

---

## VI. THE PRINCIPLE OF COVENANT RECOGNITION: LIKE DISCERNS LIKE

### English:

A further theological implication emerges from the text's logic. If the *'ēshet chayil* is identifiable by her *yir'at YHWH* — her covenant faithfulness — then the man who would recognise this quality must *himself* possess it. The question "*Who can find?*" (אֵי מִי יִמְצֵא, *mî yimtsā*) implies that discernment is required; not every man can identify such a woman. Only the man whose own life is governed by the fear of the LORD will have the spiritual perception to recognise the same quality in a woman. A man governed by lust will seek beauty; a man governed by greed will seek wealth; but a man governed by *yir'at YHWH* will seek *yir'at YHWH*.

This principle is attested in the canonical pairing of Proverbs and Ruth. Boaz, himself described as an *'ish chayil* (אִישׁ חַיִּיל, "man of valour," Ruth 2:1), recognises Ruth as an *'ēshet chayil* (Ruth 3:11).<sup>14</sup> The man of covenant substance identifies the woman of covenant substance. Their union produces the line of David — and ultimately, the

Messiah. The theology is clear: *covenant recognises covenant*. The man who keeps God's covenant will discern and be drawn to the woman who keeps God's covenant. This is the book's final instruction to the son: become a man of *yir'at YHWH*, and you will find — and deserve — a woman of *yir'at YHWH*.

Christine Roy Yoder's socioeconomic study of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31 demonstrates that the poem's economic language functions as a literary incentive for the male audience: the "profit" (*sachar*) of wisdom and of the wise wife is presented in terms that appeal to a young man's desire for honour and security.<sup>15</sup> But the economic metaphor ultimately serves the theological point: true "wealth" is covenant faithfulness, not material acquisition. Roland Murphy likewise observes that the poem "cannot be separated from the theological context of the fear of the Lord which pervades the entire book."<sup>16</sup>

### **Middel Englissh:**

A ferper godly *implicacioun* arys-ep fro þe textes logik. If þe *'ēshet chayil* is *knowable* by hire *yir'at YHWH* — hire covenant-feilfulnesse — þenne þe man þat wolde *recognisen* þis qualitee moste *hym-self* haven it. Þe questioun "*Who may fynde?*" (מי יִצְאֵהָ) imply-ep þat *discernynge* is *nedeful*; nat every man may *identifien* swich a womman. Oonly þe man whos owene lyf is governed by þe drede of þe LORD wol haven þe goostly *perciyvyng*e to *recognisen* þe same qualitee in a womman. A man governed by lust wol seken beautee; a man governed by gredynesse wol seken welþe; but a man governed by *yir'at YHWH* wol seken *yir'at YHWH*.

Þis principel is *witnessid* in þe *canonik peiryng*e of Proverbes and Ruth. Boaz, hym-self descryved as an *'ish chayil* (אִישׁ חַיִל, "man of valour," Ruth 2:1), *recogniseþ* Ruth as an *'ēshet chayil* (Ruth 3:11). Þe man of covenant-substaunce *identifieþ* þe womman of covenant-substaunce. Hire unioun bring-ep forþ þe lyne of David — and at þe laste, þe

Messie. Þe *god-lore* is cler: *covenant recogniseþ covenant*. Þe man þat kepeþ Goddes covenant wol discernen and been drawn to þe womman þat kepeþ Goddes covenant.

中文：

從經文的邏輯中浮現出一層更深的神學涵義。若「才德婦人」是藉著她的「敬畏耶和華」(*yir'at YHWH*)——她的聖約忠信——而被辨識，那麼，能辨認出此品質的男子，「自身」也必須擁有此品質。「誰能得著呢？」(*מי יתכן, mî yimtsā'*)此問題暗示了辨別力是必須的；並非每個男人都能辨認這樣的婦人。唯有自己的生命也被敬畏耶和華所治理的男子，才具有屬靈的洞察力，去辨認出一位婦人身上同樣的品質。被情慾支配的男人會追求美貌；被貪婪支配的男人會追求財富；但被「敬畏耶和華」支配的男人，將尋求「敬畏耶和華」。

這一原則在箴言書與路得記的正典配對中得到證實。波阿斯，本身被描述為一位「大財主」(*'ish chayil*, אִישׁ חַיִּיל, 「勇德之人」，路得記2:1)，他辨認出路得是一位「才德的女子」(*'eshet chayil*, 路得記3:11)。<sup>14</sup> 具有聖約實質的男子，辨認出具有聖約實質的女子。他們的結合產生了大衛的家系——最終引向彌賽亞。神學意涵至為清晰：聖約辨認聖約。守神之約的男人，會辨認並被守神之約的女人所吸引。這是此書對兒子的最終教導：成為一個「敬畏耶和華」的男人，你就能找到——也配得——一位「敬畏耶和華」的女人。

約德(Christine Roy Yoder)對箴言1-9章及31:10-31的社會經濟學研究表明，詩中的經濟語言作為對男性聽眾的文學激勵手段：智慧與智慧妻子的「利潤」(*sachar*)以吸引年輕男子對榮譽與安全之渴望的方式呈現。<sup>15</sup> 然而，經濟隱喻最終服務於神學要點：真正的「財富」是聖約忠信，而非物質獲取。墨菲(Roland Murphy)同樣觀察到，此詩「不能從敬畏耶和華的神學脈絡中分離出來——此脈絡瀰漫全書。」<sup>16</sup>

---

## VII. THE STRUCTURE OF THE POEM: A MAN TAUGHT TO SEE RIGHTLY

## English:

The acrostic structure of Proverbs 31:10–31 further confirms its pedagogical function. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet — an alphabetic acrostic serving as a *mnemonic device* for the student.<sup>17</sup> David Hubbard notes that "Alphabetic acrostics symbolise completeness and perfection (suitable for the perfect wife, for wisdom, and for the conclusion of a book), and they require artistic labour, which emphasises that the subject is worth the effort to express eloquently."<sup>18</sup>

Waltke's analysis reveals the poem's chiasmic structure, with the husband's honour at the city gate (v. 23) occupying the central pivot.<sup>19</sup> The chiasm, as demonstrated by Duane Garrett, runs:

- A: High value of the good wife (v. 10) / A': High value of a good wife (vv. 30–31)
- B: Husband benefited (vv. 11–12) / B': Husband and children praise wife (vv. 28–29)
- \*\*X: Public respect for husband (v. 23)<sup>\*\*20</sup>

This structural centre reveals an important dimension: the *'ēshet chayil's* covenant faithfulness does not merely benefit herself — it confers honour upon her husband within the covenant community. The man who chooses wisely — who selects a wife by *yir'at YHWH* rather than by charm or beauty — receives the reward of communal respect. The structure thus reinforces the motivational logic directed at the male hearer.

## Middel Englissh:

Þe *letter-ordre* (acrostic) frame-werk of Proverbes 31:10-31 ferþer *conferm-ep* its *techyng-e-purpos*. Ech vers biginneþ wiþ þe folwynge lettre of þe Ebrew *abece* — an alphabetik acrostic servynge as a *mynde-helpe* for þe studient. Þe *chiasmic structure*,

wip þe housbondes honour at þe citee gate (v. 23) occupyinge þe central *pivot*, revelep an important dimensioun: þe 'ēshet chayil's covenant-felipfulnesse conferrep honour upon hire housbonde with-inne þe covenant-communitie. Þe man þat choseþ wisely — þat selectep a wyf by *yir'at YHWH* rapen þan by charme or beautee — receyveþ þe reward of comun-al *respecte*.

中文：

箴言31:10-31的離合體結構(acrostic)進一步確認了其教學功能。每一節以希伯來字母表的下一個字母開頭——字母離合體作為學生的「記憶輔助工具」(mnemonic device)運作。

<sup>17</sup> 哈伯德(David Hubbard)指出：「字母離合體象徵完整與完美(適合於完美的妻子、智慧，以及一卷書的結尾)，且需要藝術性的勞作，強調其主題值得以雄辯方式來表達。」<sup>18</sup>

沃爾基的分析揭示了此詩的交叉結構(chiasm)，以丈夫在城門口的尊榮(第23節)佔據中心樞紐。<sup>19</sup> 此結構的中心揭示了一個重要面向：「才德婦人」的聖約忠信不僅使她自身受益——它在聖約群體中賦予她丈夫尊榮。按「敬畏耶和華」而非按艷麗或美容來選擇妻子的男人，將領受群體敬重的回報。此結構因此強化了對男性聽者的激勵邏輯。

---

## VIII. VERSE-BY-VERSE EXEGETICAL SUMMARY

English:

The poem may be outlined as follows, with each section revealing what the man is taught to value:

**Verses 10–12 (Introduction: Her Value to the Husband):** Her rarity establishes her worth. The husband's trust (*bāṭach*, נִבְטָח — a word elsewhere used almost exclusively of trust in God<sup>21</sup>) in her is complete; she brings him "good and not harm all the days of her life." This covenantal language echoes the steadfast love (*hesed*) of YHWH.



**Verses 13–18 (Her Industriousness — Alternating Parallelism):** She works with wool and flax, brings food from afar, rises before dawn, considers a field and buys it, plants a vineyard. The military imagery — "girds her loins with strength" (v. 17), provides "prey" (תָּרֵף, *teref*, v. 15) — presents her domestic work as heroic battle.<sup>22</sup>

**Verses 19–20 (Janus: Transition from Production to Beneficence):** Her hands that produce are opened wide to provide. The "palm" and "hand" vocabulary connects her industrial productivity with her charitable generosity.<sup>23</sup>

**Verses 21–27 (Chiastic Structure: Social Benefit):** Her household is clothed against the cold; she herself is clothed in strength and dignity; she speaks wisdom and Torah-instruction (*tōrat-ḥesed*, תּוֹרַת חֶסֶד, "the teaching of covenant-lovingkindness," v. 26). She is not idle.

**Verses 28–31 (Conclusion: Praise):** Her children call her blessed; her husband praises her. The final word is given to the whole community: "*Extol her for the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates*" (v. 31). The only imperative in the entire poem is directed outward — at the community, at men — commanding them to *praise* this covenant-keeping woman.<sup>24</sup>

### **Middel Englissh:**

**Verses 10-12:** Hire *rartee* stablissheþ hire worþ. Þe housbondes *trust* in hire is *hooly* — a worde elles-where used almost oonly of trust in God.

**Verses 13-18:** She werkeþ wiþ wolfe and flex, bringeþ fode fro fer, aryseþ er dawenyng. Þe militarie *ymagerye* — "gird-eþ hire loynes wiþ strengþe," provideþ "prey" — present-eþ hire hous-hold werke as *heroik bataille*.

**Verses 19-20 (Janus):** Hire hondes þat producen ben opend wyde to yeven. Þe *palme* and *hond* vocabularie *connect-eþ* hire *industrie* wiþ hire *charitee*.

**Verses 21-27:** She spekep wisdom and *Torah-instruccioun* (*tōrat-ḥesed*, "be techynge of covenant-lovyng-kyndenesse," v. 26).

**Verses 28-31:** Be oonly *commandement* in be hool poeme is direct-ed outwarde — at be communittee, at men — commandynge hem to *preyse* bis covenant-kepyng womman.

中文：

第10-12節(導論:她對丈夫的價值): 她的稀有確立了她的價值。丈夫對她的「信靠」(*bāṭach*, נִצָּח——此詞在別處幾乎專門用於對神的信靠<sup>21</sup>)是完全的; 她使他「一生有益無損」。此聖約性語言呼應耶和華的堅定慈愛(*ḥesed*)。

第13-18節(她的勤勉——交替平行結構): 她尋找羊絨和麻, 從遠方運糧, 天未亮即起, 想得田地就買來, 栽種葡萄園。軍事意象——「以能力束腰」(第17節)、提供「獵物」(*ṭeref*, תָּרֵף, 第15節)——將她的家務工作呈現為英雄戰役。<sup>22</sup>

第19-20節(雅努斯:從生產到施惠的轉折): 她生產的手, 也是慷慨打開施捨的手。「掌」與「手」的詞彙將她的工業生產力與慈善慷慨相連接。<sup>23</sup>

第21-27節(交叉結構:社會效益): 她的家人穿戴整齊不怕寒冷; 她自己以「能力和威儀為衣服」; 她開口就發智慧, 並以「慈愛的法則」(*tōrat-ḥesed*, תּוֹרַת חֶסֶד, 「聖約慈愛之教訓」, 第26節)教導人。她不吃閒飯。

第28-31節(結論:稱讚): 兒女起來稱她有福, 丈夫也稱讚她。最終的話語給予整個群體: 「願她享受操作所得的; 願她的工作在城門口榮耀她」(第31節)。全詩中唯一的祈使動詞是向外指向的——指向群體、指向男性——命令他們「稱讚」這位守約的婦人。<sup>24</sup>

---

## IX. CONCLUSION: AN ORACLE FOR MEN OF COVENANT

## English:

Proverbs 31, read in its integrity, is neither a behavioural prescription for women nor a domestic checklist. It is an *oracle* — a prophetic burden delivered by a mother to her king-son, teaching him what kind of man he must become in order to choose wisely, and what quality he must seek in a wife above all others: the fear of the LORD, which is covenant faithfulness.

The chapter teaches men three things: (1) *what to avoid* — the self-destruction of lust and intoxication (vv. 3–9); (2) *what to seek* — a woman of covenant substance, not of mere beauty or wealth (vv. 10–31); and (3) *what to become* — a man of the same covenantal character, for only covenant recognises covenant. As Waltke summarises: "wise men seek to marry her (v. 10), and all wise people aim to incarnate the wisdom she embodies, each in his own sphere of activity."<sup>25</sup>

The popular deployment of Proverbs 31 as a text "for women" not only misidentifies the audience; it inverts the text's theological purpose. The passage does not say to women, "Become this." It says to men, "*Seek this — and become worthy of finding it.*"

## Middel Englissh:

Proverbes 31, rad in its hoolenesse, is neiper a *behavioural prescripcioun* for wommen nor a hous-hold *liste-of-dedes*. It is an *oracul* — a *profetik burdoun* delivered by a moder to hire kyng-sone, techynge hym what kynde of man he moste *bicomen* to chesen wisely, and what qualitee he moste seken in a wyf aboven al opres: þe drede of þe LORD, whiche is covenant-feipfulnesse.

Þe chapitre techep men þre þinges: (1) *what to avoiden* — þe self-undoynge of lust and drunkenhede; (2) *what to seken* — a womman of covenant-substaunce, nat of meere beautee or welþe; and (3) *what to bicomen* — a man of þe same covenantal caracter, for oonly covenant *recogniseþ* covenant. Þe populer *wielding* of Proverbes 31 as a text

"for wommen" nat oonly *mis-identifieþ* þe herers; it *invertþ* þe textes godly purpos. Þe passage seiþ nat to wommen, "Bicome þis." It seiþ to men, "*Seke þis — and bicomeworpy of fyndynge it.*"

中文：

箴言第三十一章，在其完整性中閱讀，既非對女性的行為規範，亦非家務清單。它是一篇「默示」——一個先知性的重擔，由一位母親傳遞給她的王子，教導他必須成為什麼樣的男人才能智慧地選擇，以及他在妻子身上所當尋求的、超越一切其他品質的品質：敬畏耶和華——即聖約忠信。

此章教導男人三件事：(一)「當避免什麼」——情慾與醉酒的自我毀滅(第3-9節)；(二)「當尋求什麼」——一位具聖約實質的婦人，而非僅有美貌或財富(第10-31節)；(三)「當成為什麼」——一個具有同樣聖約品格的男人，因為唯有聖約能辨認聖約。正如沃爾基所總結：「智慧的男人尋找她為妻(第10節)，所有智慧的人都以體現她所彰顯的智慧為目標，各在其自己的活動範圍之內。」<sup>25</sup>

將箴言第三十一章當作一段「給女性」的經文來運用，不僅錯認了對象聽眾；更顛倒了經文的神學目的。此段經文並未對女性說：「成為這樣。」它對男性說的是：「尋求這個——並使自己配得找到它。」

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY / 參考書目

- CBE International. "Finding 'The Proverbs 31 Woman.'" *CBE International*, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/finding-proverbs-31-woman/>.
- Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Hult, Dan. "An Oracle for a King: Lessons from Proverbs 31." *Dan Hult*, 29 May 2023.

- Waltke, Bruce K. "The Valiant Wife." *Biblical Training*, Lecture 22, OT560.
- Longman, Tremper III. *Proverbs*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Fox, Michael V. *Proverbs 10–31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Fox, Michael V. *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Wolters, Al. "Proverbs XXXI 10–31 as Heroic Hymn: A Form-Critical Analysis." *Vetus Testamentum* 38, no. 4 (1988): 446–57.
- Yoder, Christine Roy. *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001.
- Murphy, Roland E. *Proverbs*. Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998.
- Garrett, Duane. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*. New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993.
- Hubbard, David A. *Proverbs*. Communicator's Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1993.
- McCreesh, Thomas P. "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10–31." *Revue Biblique* 92, no. 1 (1985): 25–46.
- Hawkins, Tom R. "The Wife of Noble Character in Proverbs 31:10–31." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 609 (January–March 1996): 12–23.
- Mowczko, Margaret. "Revisiting Eshet Chayil ('Woman of Valour')." *Marg Mowczko*, 2023.
- Aitken, Kenneth T. *Proverbs*. Daily Study Bible. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986.
- James, Carolyn Custis. *The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.

- Lau, Peter H. W., and Gregory Goswell. *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 41. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016.
- Sailhamer, John. *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Ahlman, Elizabeth. *Demystifying the Proverbs 31 Woman*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020.
- Held Evans, Rachel. "3 Things You Might Not Know About Proverbs 31." *Rachel Held Evans Blog*, 2012.

---

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> CBE International, "Finding 'The Proverbs 31 Woman.'" <sup>2</sup> Waltke, "The Valiant Wife," *Biblical Training* Lecture 22. <sup>3</sup> Hult, "An Oracle for a King." <sup>4</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs 15–31*, 509–12. <sup>5</sup> Hult, "An Oracle for a King." <sup>6</sup> Longman, *Proverbs*; cf. United Church of God Bible Commentary on Proverbs 31:10–31. <sup>7</sup> Waltke, "The Valiant Wife," *Biblical Training* Lecture 22. <sup>8</sup> Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 6–7: "The audience is plural also in 4:1 and 7:24. The plural indicates that the instruction is actually intended for all young men." <sup>9</sup> Mowczko, "Revisiting Eshet Chayil." <sup>10</sup> CBE International, "Finding 'The Proverbs 31 Woman'"; cf. Wolters, "Proverbs XXXI," 456–57. <sup>11</sup> Wolters, "Proverbs XXXI 10–31 as Heroic Hymn," 446–57. <sup>12</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 6:2, 13, 24; 10:12–13, 20; 31:12–13. <sup>13</sup> Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 69–72; *Proverbs 10–31*, 892–93. <sup>14</sup> James, *The Gospel of Ruth*, 164–66; Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness*, ch. 4. <sup>15</sup> Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 89–101. <sup>16</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 252. <sup>17</sup> Hubbard, *Proverbs*, 477. <sup>18</sup> Ibid. <sup>19</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs 15–31*, 517–19. <sup>20</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs*, 248. <sup>21</sup> Waltke, "The Valiant Wife": "Trust is otherwise used only of God with an exception of 20:36." <sup>22</sup> Wolters, "Proverbs XXXI,"

456–57; Waltke, *Proverbs 15–31*, 516. <sup>23</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs 15–31*, 525–26. <sup>24</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 245. <sup>25</sup> Waltke, *Proverbs 15–31*, 520.

---

*Soli Deo Gloria* 唯獨榮耀歸於上帝 *To God all the glory*